

An outline map of California is shown in the background. The western portion of the map is filled with a solid dark blue color, while the rest of the map is white with a thin grey border. The text is overlaid on the map.

# **Handgun Commerce in California 2000**

**A Report from the Violence Prevention Research Program**



The Violence Prevention Research Program is located at the University of California, Davis. Its work addresses the causes, nature, and prevention of violence.

The Handgun Commerce in California project is funded in part by a grant from The David & Lucile Packard Foundation.

This report was prepared by VPRP staff members Barbara Claire, Kevin Grassel, Vanessa McHenry, Donna Valadez, Michael Romero, Garen Wintemute and Mona Wright. We are grateful for the technical assistance provided by Mr. Randy Rossi, Chief, Firearms Branch, California Department of Justice, and his staff, and by Mr. Chris Hadley of the Sacramento Police Department.

Suggested citation: Handgun Commerce in California, 2000. Sacramento, CA: Violence Prevention Research Program, 2004.

© VPRP May be reproduced with attribution.

Mailing Address: Violence Prevention Research Program  
University of California, Davis  
Western Fairs Building  
2315 Stockton Blvd.  
Sacramento, CA 95817

E-Mail: [vprp@ucdavis.edu](mailto:vprp@ucdavis.edu)

This document is available in PDF format at the VPRP  
Web site: <http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/vprp/>

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Handgun Sales</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Handgun Manufacturers</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Denied Sales</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Handgun Purchasers</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Firearm Licensees</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Appendix I: Comparative Tables</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Appendix II: County and City Data</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Appendix III: Technical Notes</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Appendix IV: Additional Resources</b>	<b>127</b>

# Executive Summary

---

This report provides basic information on handgun commerce in California for the year 2000. Its principal focus is on the handguns sold that year. It also contains information on handgun purchasers, denied sales, handgun manufacturers, and commercial firearm licensees such as gun dealers and pawnbrokers. Its purpose is to inform the public, policy makers, and others about commerce in an important consumer product—the handgun—which has legitimate uses but is also frequently involved in criminal and self-inflicted violence.

*Handgun Commerce in California, 2000* relies largely on information in the Dealer's Record of Sales (DROS) archive that is maintained by the California Department of Justice. A DROS record is created each time an individual seeks to purchase a new or used handgun from a firearm licensee. The record, which contains basic identifying information on that individual and on the handgun he or she wishes to purchase, is sent to the Department of Justice for review. A small percentage of sales are denied by the Department of Justice after a mandatory background check; records for both approved and denied sales are retained by the Department.

This report does not contain information on all handgun sales in California. Some sales between private individuals are not included because there is no record of them: State law requires that nearly all such private-party transfers be routed through a firearm licensee so that a DROS record can be made and a background check can be conducted, but compliance is less than perfect. We have also excluded transactions involving the operations of the Department of Justice itself and certain other transactions. As a result of those exclusions, the sales tabulations here do not agree exactly with those provided by the Department of Justice.

## **Handgun Sales**

A total of 193,489 handguns were sold in California in 2000, approximately 8.4 sales per 1,000 persons ages 21 and older. Handgun sales fluctuated little from month to month until the end of the year, then increased considerably. Sales ranged from a low of 13,085 in April to a high of 32,979 in December.

While the number of handgun sales was highest in urban counties (Los Angeles County ranked first with 40,824 sales), the rate of sales on a per-capita

# Executive Summary

---

basis was highest in predominantly rural counties (Trinity County ranked first with 25.1 sales per 1,000 persons ages 21 and older).

Sixty-eight percent of handguns sold in California in 2000 were semiautomatic pistols. Large-caliber handguns were the most common (48.6%), and most handguns had long barrels (77.5%). Nearly two-thirds of handguns were manufactured in the United States.

Males bought 92.2% of handguns, and 72.9% were bought by persons ages 25–34, 35–44, or 45–54.

Sales at gun shows accounted for 2.8% of all handgun sales. Private party transfers accounted for 8.9% of sales.

## Handgun Manufacturers

While handguns from 639 manufacturers were sold in California in 2000, the top 20 manufacturers accounted for 84.1% of all sales. Of these manufacturers, 11 are primarily located in the United States. Several of the remaining top manufacturers operate in the U.S. through subsidiaries. Overall, Smith & Wesson ranked first in sales (34,819 handguns, 18.0%), followed by Sturm, Ruger (28,181 handguns, 14.6%), and Glock, a manufacturer based in Austria (19,667 handguns, 10.2%).

Smith & Wesson was the leading manufacturer of revolvers sold in California (21,597 revolvers, 36.9%), and Glock was the largest manufacturer of semiautomatic pistols sold in the state (19,667 pistols, 14.9%)

Smith & Wesson was the largest manufacturer of large-caliber handguns (18,118 handguns, 19.3%) and medium-caliber handguns (13,222 handguns, 20.5%) sold in California. Sturm, Ruger was the largest manufacturer of small-caliber handguns (7,468 handguns, 22.6%).

Two of the top 20 manufacturers are headquartered in Southern California; Bryco Arms/Jennings Firearms (Costa Mesa) and Phoenix Arms (Ontario) together accounted for 2,682 (1.4%) of the handguns sold in California.

There were two new manufacturers on the top 20 list for 2000; Kel-Tec

# Executive Summary

---

(Cocoa, Florida) and Magnum Research (Minneapolis, Minnesota) together accounted for 3,362 (1.7%) of the handguns sold in California.

## **Denied Sales**

In January 2000, California limited handgun purchases from commercial firearm licensees to one per person in any 30-day period (private-party transfers are exempted). The law also prohibits firearm purchases by any person who has been convicted of a felony or violent misdemeanor, is an unlawful user of or is addicted to a controlled substance, is an illegal alien, is subject to a domestic violence restraining order, and certain others.

There were 3,632 denied sales in 2000: 1,621 prohibited-person denials and 2,011 one gun a month denials. This represents approximately two denied sales for every 100 handguns sold. A total of 3,444 individuals attempted to purchase handguns but were denied; 95.1% of these individuals were denied once, and the remainder were linked to as many as seven denied sales.

Most handguns involved in both one gun a month and prohibited-person denied sales were pistols, three-fourths had long barrels, and nearly two-thirds were of U.S. origin. Handguns denied to prohibited persons were more likely to be of medium or large caliber (43.1% medium, 43.0% large) than were handguns in one gun a month denials (28.9% medium, 47.8% large).

The majority (94.1%) of both groups of denied sales were to males. Nearly half (46.2%) of the prohibited-person denials were for persons between 21 and 34 years of age compared with 23.3% of the one gun a month denials.

The list of manufacturers most frequently involved in denied sales generally resembled the list of manufacturers of handguns that were most frequently sold.

Among prohibited-person denials, 76.8% were for prior criminal convictions: 40.3% for felonies and 36.5% for misdemeanors. Drug-related offenses were the most common felony convictions (29.6%). Nearly all the misdemeanor convictions (83.1%) were for assault.

## **Handgun Purchasers**

A total of 134,227 Californians purchased these 193,489 handguns. The

# Executive Summary

---

vast majority (90.9%) of the handgun purchasers were male, and almost half (50.4%) were ages 25-34 or 35-44. Most of the purchasers (77.3%) bought only one handgun; the 22.7% of purchasers who bought more than one handgun accounted for 46.4% of all handguns sold.

A total of 103,743 people bought one handgun in 2000. Most of these handgun purchasers were male (89.9%), and they were most commonly ages 25-34 (26.3%). Another 30,484 people bought at least two and as many as 225 handguns in 2000; they bought 89,746 handguns in total. Most of these purchasers were male (94.3%), and they were most commonly ages 35-44 (26.3%).

There were 2,031 people who bought more than five handguns in 2000. They accounted for only 1.5% of all purchasers but bought 9.5% of all handguns sold: a total of 18,383 handguns.

## Firearm Licensees

A total of 1,936 firearm licensees reported handgun sales in 2000, approximately 8.4 licensees per 100,000 persons ages 21 and older. The majority of licensees reporting sales were in the urban counties of Southern California and the San Francisco Bay area (Los Angeles County ranked first with 273 licensees), but the highest numbers of licensees on a per-capita basis were found in rural counties (Alpine County ranked first with 115.5 licensees per 1,000 persons ages 21 and older).

Gun dealers accounted for 86.2% of licensees and 86.7% of handgun sales; pawnbrokers accounted for 11.7% of licensees and 9.8% of handgun sales. (Additional sales were reported by non-retailer licensees.)

The 43.2% of all retailers who sold fewer than ten handguns accounted for just 1.6% of handgun sales by retailers. The 94 retailers selling 500 or more handguns accounted for 4.9% of all retailers but 52.1% of all handgun sales by retailers.

Of the retailers with the largest number of denied sales, about half were also among those with the largest number of handgun sales. Denied sales for these large-volume retailers ranged from 1.4 to 6.4 for every 100 handguns sold.



---

To help us provide useful information, please let us know about any problems you've encountered in using *Handgun Commerce in California, 2000* and make suggestions on what you'd like to see added to our publication for year 2001.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

◆ Request for *Handgun Commerce in California, 2001*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please Mail Suggestions and/or Request to:

Violence Prevention Research Program  
University of California, Davis  
Western Fairs Building  
2315 Stockton Blvd.  
Sacramento, CA 95817

E-Mail: [vprp@ucdavis.edu](mailto:vprp@ucdavis.edu)

Website: <http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/vprp/>